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ABSTRACT

Project Engage is an after-school, weekend, and summer educational program geared toward minority and disadvantaged students to increase the number of these students seeking postsecondary education from the Erie, Pennsylvania area. It is funded mainly through Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, whose administration is strongly committed to increasing minority and disadvantaged students enrollment at the university, and by the City of Erie Housing Authority, the Erie School District, and the Greater Erie Community Action Committee. The program's fourth-year budget totaled $21,978. Staffing is provided by minority teachers from the Erie School District. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Erie Alumnae Chapter, provides staff support. The psychology and elementary education departments have served the program at various times. The university's Student Affairs Division has provided staff support for the summer programs. Administrative support is provided by the John F. Kennedy Center, a multi-purpose center in Erie. Project Engage is composed of several functions, including preparation for taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test, tutorial assistance, cultural enrichment, counseling, summer remedial instruction, and a residential summer camp. While results have been difficult to measure, the program is seen to fill a local need. (MSE)

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Project Engage

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

Project Engage is an after-school, weekend, and summer educational program geared toward minority and disadvantaged students to increase the number of these students seeking post-secondary education from the Erie, Pennsylvania, area.

The project is mainly funded through the generous support of President Foster F. Diebold of Edinboro University of Pennsylvania who has a strong commitment to increasing the numbers of the aforementioned students attending this institution of higher education. The program is entering its fourth year of operation with an overall budget this year of $21,978.

Additional support is furnished to the program by the City of Erie Housing Authority, the Erie School District, and the Greater Erie Community Action Committee.

Staffing for the program is provided by minority teachers from the Erie School District. The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Erie Alumnae Chapter, provides staff support.

The psychology and elementary education departments have serviced this program at various times during its existence. The Student Affairs Division of the University has provided staff support for the summer programs of this project. Administrative support for the program is provided by the John F. Kennedy Center, a multi-purpose center in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Project Engage is composed of several different areas, including SAT Test-Taking Preparation, summer programming, and Project Camp, which it has in common with Project Success, a similar program in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Project Engage also cooperates with other community ventures to provide a vehicle for students to obtain educational success.

INTRODUCTION

Project Engage is discussed in the following pages. The discussion centers on its makeup and function in the Erie community. Staffing and the budgeting for the various project components is reviewed. Some discussion of a similar program in Meadville, Pennsylvania, is necessary because these programs jointly participate in Project Camp.

BACKGROUND

Benjamin Franklin remarked in his *Proposals Relating to Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, in 1749, that the good education of youth has been esteemed by wise men in all ages as the surest foundation of the happiness both of private families and of commonwealths. Almost all governments have, therefore, made it a priority to establish and endow with proper revenue such learning seminaries as might supply the succeeding age with men qualified to serve the public with honor to themselves and to their country. Although Mr. Franklin was referring to the needs of all students to have the proper environment for educational success, the need is yet to be completely achieved for minority and disadvantaged youth. The University must continue programming in the Erie, Pennsylvania, area to assist minority and disadvantaged students in developing their educational aptitudes.

More and more students are being sidetracked from their educational efforts by impediments outside the classroom, such as drug abuse. The lack of parental support and discipline are also prevalent factors in a poverty-impacted environment. Other factors, such as peer pressures, influence students in this inability to secure a basic education within the standard school setting. At a recent meeting on this subject a teacher complained about the cruelty students show one another in such matters as the brand name of sneakers they wear. Rather than dwelling on the importance of education, some students were embroiled in the fashions worn.

The number of these students pursuing post-secondary education continues to decline. The Erie School District's truancy expert expressed concerns about the number of students absent on a daily basis and the problems associated with getting these students to attend school on a regular basis. General observations of the depressed Erie areas show the disregard for school as many school-age children are seen walking the streets during school hours. This chronic absenteeism adversely affects the failure rate in the Erie School District. Since these students are not dropped from the rolls, they are graded at the conclusion of each grading period as other students who attend classes regularly would be.

Historically, many minority and disadvantaged students have not pursued post-secondary education either due to lack of interest or poor academic preparation. According to Edinboro University Act 101 statistics, students drop out of college because of poor academic preparation or lack of motivation. National statistics reveal that approximately 42 percent of junior high

students drop out of school. Of this number it is suspected that minority and disadvantaged students represent the majority. It is imperative to initiate a program that not only challenges and motivates minority and disadvantaged achievers, but also encourages, supports, and provides the basic survival skills of a complex society. One researcher has noted that only 22 percent of black high school graduates in the Erie area are attending colleges or universities in this area. This suggests that black students, as the area's main minority group, are either not interested in post-secondary education or are migrating to a large extent out of the area to pursue further education. Further, Clark Thomas recently reported in an article entitled "Blacks Aren't Going to College" information that strongly supports the University's premise of the need to begin early intervention with black and disadvantaged youth to influence the future of their educational pursuits.

The purpose of Project Engage is to provide a program assisting minority and disadvantaged students in reversing the cycle of educational deprivation which appears pervasive in their communities. By offering a variety of programs the project intends to positively affect the lives of those minority and disadvantaged students, encouraging them to continue their education beyond high school. The programs are diverse, encompassing a wide spectrum of varied interests. In essence, there is something for everyone, from the athlete to the academician.

DESCRIPTION

SAT Preparation

As part of Project Engage, the SAT preparation offers minority and disadvantaged students the opportunity to experience hands-on practice. Three sessions are planned for a period of ten weeks each. The program offers two hours of instruction per week over this ten-week period. One hour is devoted to the verbal and the other to the math problems appearing on the test.

The course is held in the main conference room of the Greater Erie Community Action Committee on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon during this period. The students are provided classroom materials such as sample tests, notebooks, pencils and dictionaries. The students need only to come to take advantage of this program, as there is no fee. In addition, students who actively participate during the ten segments of the program can have the fees for one test paid for by Project Engage. The only requirement is that the student share the test results with Project Engage staff for evaluative purposes.

The course instruction is provided by two certified teachers from the Erie School District. One teacher has extensive experience in teaching the test's verbal portion, derived from her lengthy service to a local upward bound program. The other instructor has extensive experience in teaching math not only as an instructor but also as part of the Erie School District

TELLS program. Both have also been with Project Engage since the inception of this aspect of the program.

This portion is designed to expose minority students to test-taking activity early, enabling them to enhance test scores. Various tips are offered during the ten-week session.

The program costs $2,295.00. Each instructor is paid $17.50 per hour for thirty (30) hours, totaling $525.00 each. Supplies such as paper, pencils, dictionaries, etc., cost $300.00. Student testing fees are $15.00 per week for thirty (30) weeks, totaling $450.00.

The Erie Housing Authority, which operates several housing complexes and scattered site units in the Erie area, has allowed Project Engage to use its community room, located at its office building at 1839 East 18th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania, 16510, at no charge. Further, the Housing Authority has provided such services as furniture and maintenance of the area at no cost. It has also offered its generous support in making this program a success. The Erie School District has provided furniture, books, workbooks, and other in-kind services to ensure the program's success. The certified teachers are employed by the Erie School District which employs the largest minority teacher population in northwestern Pennsylvania. The John F. Kennedy Center provides fiscal management over the project and allows the use of its facilities, including equipment such as copiers. Other community organizations, such as the Gateway Development Center, have provided space and assistance at various times to make the program available in city areas.

After-School Course

The after-school program operates each Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at 1839 East 18th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania, 16510. Other locations such as the Gateway Development Center, 244 East 23rd Street, Erie, Pennsylvania, 16503, have also been used. The program consists of 72 two-hour days with a budget of $6,425.00. This figure includes money to pay three teachers approximately $15.00 per hour, purchase supplies, and pay for field trips.

This component of Project Engage emphasizes tutorial assistance. Assistance is provided to increase and/or maintain the academic prowess of project participants by assisting with students' homework or by setting up a program to assist students in their area of needs.

Cultural enrichment is also emphasized. Students participate in a variety of cultural experiences which expose them to minority cultural values, as well as those of the majority community.

Counseling is also provided to increase self image and esteem of these students. This portion is augmented by graduate students from the psychology department of Edinboro University who assist as volunteer counselors.

The project also utilizes field trips to a variety of local sources, such as the University's planetarium, and to out-of-town sources such as the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Remediation Course

Remediation courses in reading, English and math are offered in the summer utilizing the JFK Center as a base of operations. The course is operated in conjunction with the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Erie Alumnae Chapter, a public service sorority. The course operates eight hours per week for six weeks. The program utilizes four certified teachers and two counselors eight hours per week during the six-week course. The program necessarily involves some transportation either through the use of the center's van, university van, bus passes or a combination.

The remediation course enables students to enhance their proficiency in the areas of concern mentioned before. The course is augmented with extras such as photography lessons and art education. Field trips to such places as the Asbury Wood Nature Center and Pymatuning Reservoir are offered to enhance this learning process. Practical experiences are afforded by utilizing on-campus University facilities like the computer lab and the planetarium.

The cost for the instructors and counselors for this portion of Project Engage is $3,600.00. The cost for books, supplies, educational necessities, transportation, recreational and miscellaneous expenses is $846.00.

Project Camp

Project Camp operates during the summer and is a residential camp for selected students between eight and eleven years of age who reside in the Erie and Meadville areas. The camp runs for a period of one week. Most of the students are participants of the outreach programs of Edinboro University - Engage and Success.

The purposes of the camp are: (a) to encourage an interest in scholastic success and future college enrollment; and (b) to provide these students with an otherwise unattainable camp experience.

The camp includes an education component with classes in math/computers and reading/library usage, provided by faculty members of Edinboro University's Miller Learning Center. A recreational component is managed by the members of the Student Affairs staff. Students are housed in the University's dormitory and generally live as regular college students with respect to meals and use of campus facilities.

The cost for this portion of Project Engage, which is shared with Project Success, is $3,248.00. This includes payment for faculty and student workers, supplies, housing and other miscellaneous expenses.

RESULTS

We evaluated the program from three standpoints. First, we compared students' standings at the start of the school year and their standings at the end. Second, we compared the results of an SAT test taken by students prior to joining the program to the results after being involved in the program. Third, we determined the number of students in the program who enrolled in a post-secondary program.

We are finding that the turnover is very great in a program of this nature. Results are difficult to measure, because we may see several hundred unduplicated students who are not in the program long enough to be evaluated. Also, we have determined that the program must be initiated earlier than junior high school, so students will consider options other than the way of life as it exists in their communities. We also found that a large number of students come to the program to receive help with their homework which they do not or cannot receive at home.

CONCLUSION

The program serves a need in the neighborhood where it is located. Although it competes with many other activities in its surrounding environments, a consistent number of students seek help from the program. However, efforts must continue to encourage parental participation and to discern a consistent group of students which may be tracked for study purposes.

This program could be replicated easily by other colleges and universities.